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TAGS: PREL PBTS MARR MD RS
SUBJECT: BURNS-KARASIN LETTER ON MOLDOVA

REF: A) STATE 79597 B) CHISINAU 698

Classified By: PolMilCouns Alice G. Wells. Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) On June 8 we sent Ref A Burns-Karasin letter to the MFA under cover of a diplomatic note. We also met with Ambassador at Large Nesterushkin to deliver a courtesy copy.

¶2. (C) Nesterushkin's first reaction was to criticize the U.S. for "leaking" the document; he said the EU had praised the plan, and the Transnistrians had rejected it, before Karasin got a chance to look at it. We replied that there was no secret about our intent to put forward proposals on the PKF; the Transnistrians were reflexively rejecting something they had not seen. Russia should focus on the letter's content, an invitation to a serious dialog.

¶3. (C) Nesterushkin's next tack was to say that in view of the constant tensions between Transnistria and Moldova -- he cited the Moldovan attempt to hold a municipal election in a left-bank village (Ref B) -- it would be dangerous to meddle with the PKF structure. We replied that the incident in question was hardly the precursor to a major conflict; Nesterushkin replied, "You Americans never take anything seriously."

¶4. (C) Comment: Given recent developments -- including Moldova's demandeur status as Sova and Tkaciuk seek Russian support for their package -- Russia will be seeking more control over the process, not less. We are picking up hints that Russia is trying to persuade Moldova to ditch the five plus two process in favor of "direct negotiations," i.e., Russian-brokered talks without the U.S., EU, OSCE or Ukraine.

This might explain why Russia has recently started distancing itself from Transnistrian leader Smirnov -- the promise of a new interlocutor might sweeten the deal for Voronin.

BURNS